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SUBJECT: Argentina: Ambassador Meets New UN Representative

CLASSIFIED BY: Vilma Martinez, Ambassador, DOS, Front Office; REASON: 1.4(B), (D)

¶1. (SBU) Ambassador Martinez met on January 28 with the newly-arrived UNDP representative in Argentina, Martin Santiago. Santiago is charged with coordinating the activities of 12 UN agencies in Argentina. Warm and friendly with US officials, Santiago will be a helpful interlocutor and partner in working with Argentina to achieve common objectives.

¶2. (C) Santiago said he is trying to get the lay of the land after arriving in Argentina in late 2009 for his second tour. Describing Deputy Foreign Minister Victorio Taccetti as "pragmatic and positive," Santiago said he hopes to establish a close working relationship with the Foreign Relations Ministry. The Ambassador noted that one key challenge in working with Argentines is the powerful labor unions and the national government's close relations with them. Santiago agreed, commending the Ambassador on her and CODEL Engel's January 2010 meeting with powerful union boss Hugo Moyano of the General Confederation of Workers.

¶3. (C) Santiago stressed that he would like UN agencies to work in a "low-profile manner," respectful of government parameters. He confided to the Ambassador that the government did not approve of a series of UN-supported "town hall" meetings in Argentina to determine public priorities. He claimed that the early December 2009 resignation of Marta Oyhanarte, the Casa Rosada's Subsecretary for Institutional Reform and Democratic Strengthening, was partly due to national government displeasure over these meetings. (Note: In early December, Oyhanarte, writing on her blog, explained that after six years of working freely in her post she was resigning due to "daily restrictions" on her work, including the cancellation of already established programs and the national government's pressure to replace technically-skilled employees with those not prepared for their posts).

¶4. (C) Santiago relayed that the UNDP is working on social development programs, particularly in Argentina's poor northern region. He said Argentina has achieved a number of the eight millennium development objectives for 2015, but more progress is needed in the areas of maternal mortality, infant mortality, and access to food. While describing Argentina as one of "the most advanced countries in terms of gender equity," he said improvement is still needed in the area of gender equity in income. As to foreign partners, he noted the UN has received support for its programs from the United Kingdom, Spain, New Zealand, and Norway.
MARTINEZ